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CDC Health Advisory

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Instructions for Identifying and Protecting Displaced Children

Rapid identification and protection of displaced children (less than 18 years) is imperative in order to reduce the potential for maltreatment, neglect, exploitation, and emotional injury. A critical aspect of pediatric disaster response is effectively addressing the needs of children who have been displaced from their families and legal guardians. The separation of children from significant others is a recognized factor influencing the psychological responses of children after a disaster.

Hurricane Katrina and the ensuing floods and chaos have caused over 3,000 children to be displaced throughout the United States. These children may be unaccompanied or accompanied by adults who are not their legal guardians. All medical clinics and shelters providing care to child survivors of natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina should immediately implement appropriate child-safety measures in direct response to this crisis. Initiatives such as "Operation Child ID" implemented in Camp Gruber Oklahoma have provided a rapid, systematic protocol for successfully identifying and protecting displaced children. CDC has reviewed this protocol and considers it to be a useful resource to share with its partners to promote a safer and healthier environment for displaced children in shelters:

Protocol to Rapidly Identify and Protect Displaced Children

- Survey all children in your shelter to identify children who are not with their legal guardians – these children have a high probability of being listed as missing by family members; find out where they are sleeping in the shelter; and the name and age of the person who is supervising them. A survey for identifying displaced child evacuees is available online at <http://www.health.ok.gov/bt/>.
- Place a hospital-style identification bracelet (or a picture identification card, ideally) on the child and a matching one on the supervising adult(s). Check frequently to make sure that the wrist band matches that of the adult(s) seen with the child in the shelter.
- The names of all children identified through the survey as not being with their legal guardians should be considered at high-risk and immediately reported to the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) at 1-888-544-5475. The NCMEC can then cross-check them with the names of children who have been reported missing.
- After the "high risk" children have been reported, a complete list of children's names in the clinic or shelter should be sent to the NCMEC in case adults and/or children have provided incorrect information about their relationship and status.
- Children who are not with their legal guardians (i.e., prior to the hurricane) should undergo a safety and well-being assessment (taking into consideration an assessment of the relationship between the child and accompanying adult), ideally performed by a physician with pediatric experience.
- If NCMEC informs you that the child has been reported as missing, locate the child and facilitate reunification of the child and his/her legal guardian.

Additional Information

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) 2005 <http://www.missingkids.com/> NCMEC records children who are less than 21 years of age who have been reported missing or displaced

The medical care at Camp Gruber is being provided through a partnership between the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) and the Oklahoma Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)

For additional information on this protocol please contact Dr. Mark Brandenburg Associate Professor, Director,
Section of Emergency Medicine/Department of Internal Medicine
University of Oklahoma College of Medicine-Tulsa
4502 East 41st St.
Tulsa, OK 74135-2512
Email: Mark-Brandenburg@ouhsc.edu

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention contacts: Wendy Heaps email: Wah9@cdc.gov or
Teri Barber email: TBB8@cdc.gov

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